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IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Somalia: Ability to obtain documentation, including medical, education and employment records; effectiveness of the postal service, on both domestic and international level (2020–January 2022) [SOM200887.E]

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Overview

A feasibility study on a national identification system for Somalia conducted by the World Bank et al. explains that

Somalia has not consolidated identity management around a single national system. It lacks any type of population register or national ID system, and has a limited and poorly functioning civil registry. In the absence of a viable foundational system, a patchwork of functional systems provides Somalis with their only viable proof of identity. However, these foundational systems are lacking in coverage and many suffer from a variety of issues, including high costs, complex processes, difficulties in verifying a person's true identity, and a lack of common standards. In addition, the absence of a unique legal identity instrument to underpin foundational systems (e.g., a birth certificate) means that fake or forged documents are rampant in the country. (World Bank, et al. 2016, 12)

According to the US Department of State's Reciprocity Schedule for Somalia,

[t]here continues to be no recognized competent civil authority to issue civil documents. The Government of Somalia ceased to exist in December of 1990, and the country underwent a destructive and brutal civil war, in the course of which most records were destroyed. Those few records not destroyed are in the hands of private individuals or are otherwise not retrievable. (US n.d.a)

In joint correspondence with the Research Directorate, lawyers from a law firm in Somalia whose practice areas include regulatory compliance, a law firm in the US whose practice areas include immigration law, and an international law firm based in Canada that provides advice on transactions in Africa, stated the following:

In Somalia, due to the collapse of the central government and the civil war, there is no centralized infrastructure to manage civil identification. As a result, reliable national identification is currently not available. However, there are currently medical, education, and employment records individuals can obtain at hospitals and at regional city municipalit[ies].

Given the current landscape of [there being] six member states of Federal Somalia, excluding Somaliland, official document requirements and procedures will vary substantially across Federal Member States (FMS) within the Jurisdiction of Somalia. (Lawyers 14 Jan. 2022)

The lawyers also indicated that

[i]n November 2018, the Council of Ministers approved the Somali Registration and Identification policy. This policy provides guidance for the implementation and administration of public identification systems. The policy is administered at a national level and outlines the registration of these unique identification numbers and cards using modern technologies. Although the public needs a variety of civil events to be registered, this policy only includes certificates for specific events, including birth, death, marriage, divorce, and *kafala* [*kafalah*] [1]. These developments are important given [that] a recent survey indicated [that] many children did not have a birth certificate and their births were not registered. (Lawyers 14 Jan. 2022)

Information on the implementation of this policy could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

A report by the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS), an organization comprised of 14 NGOs [2] that aims "to maintain focused momentum and stakeholder engagement towards durable solutions for displacement-affected communities in East Africa and the Horn of Africa" (ReDSS n.d.), based on research conducted from November 2018 to February 2019 in Mogadishu, Baidoa and Kismayo including semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 275 internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees and host community members, also

states that “[a]ccess to documentation is limited for all populations. However, high costs and administrative obstacles exist for IDPs and returnees” (ReDSS [2019], 15, 57). A country of origin information report on South and Central Somalia by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands indicates that “[i]n South and Central Somalia, documents still play little or no role. Somali citizens do not require identity documents when travelling within Somalia” (Netherlands Mar. 2019, 28).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the President of the Somali Canadian Cultural Society of Edmonton (SCCSE), a non-profit organization with the purpose of “meet[ing] the needs of the Somali Canadian community in Edmonton” and environs and whose services include “identify[ing] whether someone is a Somali Citizen or not for Immigration Canada,” stated that “[d]ue to the collapse of the central government of Somalia in 1991 as a result of the civil war and the destruction of public institutions and public records, all documents from Somalia have to be verified” (President 13 Jan. 2022).

2. Availability of and Ability to Obtain Documentation

Information on the ability to obtain documentation in Somalia was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The ReDSS report notes that “[a]ccess to documentation is severely limited” (ReDSS [2019], 57). According to the ReDSS, “[r]eturnees have refugee status ID cards, which they use as documentation. Access to any other documentation, however, remains prohibitive financially and unclear administratively” (ReDSS [2019], 57). The same source states this about the difficulties to access to documentation, especially for IDPs:

Consultations suggest documentation is a low priority for IDPs, who are concerned with more urgent issues of food security and housing. Government capacity to deal with the registration of the IDP population is low, as are levels of awareness on the part of IDPs concerning access to these services. Obtaining or renewing documents remains a challenge for IDPs and returnees. ... Returnees have refugee ID cards, which they can use as documentation. Other groups often do not have access to any documentation at all. Obtaining passports is equally unaffordable and clarity is lacking on the requirements to be met. (ReDSS [2019], 57)

According to the US Country Reciprocity Schedule, the following documents are not available: adoption certificates, identity cards, court/prison records, police certificates and military records (US n.d.a). The ReDSS also states the following:

The data concerning access to documentation is limited. Community consultations and focus group discussions reveal that lack of access to documentation remains a significant issue. There is no civil registry. With regard to registration and the issuance of civil status and identity documents, practices are inconsistent and there is a lack of clear and uniform procedures. (ReDSS [2019], 65)

Concerning the processes to obtain official documents, the lawyers stated that official documents, including medical, education and employment records can be obtained from different institutions in each region:

1. Institutions such as the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Labour, and the Minister of Higher Education Religious Affairs and Endowments.
2. City municipalities that are responsible for the registration and issuance of certificates.
3. Private and government hospitals. (Lawyers 14 Jan. 2022)

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Executive Director of the Somali Development Center (SDC), “an [i]mmigrant-led and minority-run organization founded in 1996” based in Boston and whose “mission is to provide consistently excellent and accessible services to refugees and immigrants” (SDC n.d.), stated that “some” official documents, including medical, education and employment records can be obtained “from some parts of the country,” however, the individual requiring documents would need to “arrange” to obtain them and a third party is not able to obtain them for them (Executive Director 13 Jan. 2022).

The SDC Executive Director stated that these official documents contain “[y]our basic demographic information such as names, gender, place of birth, etc.” (Executive Director 13 Jan. 2022). The same source also indicated that it is possible to obtain these documents from abroad “but NOT smoothly” (Executive Director 13 Jan. 2022, emphasis in original). In contrast, the lawyers noted that “[t]hese documents can only be obtained locally” (Lawyers 14 Jan. 2022).

2.1 Medical Records

The lawyers stated that “medical records pertaining to a test, examination, medications, and treatments can all be obtained by the private or publicly-run government hospital” (Lawyers 14 Jan. 2022). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director of Dr Mahdi Multispecialty Hospital (DMH), which is located in Somaliland and consists of 30 employees including 6 doctors (DMH n.d.), stated the following in response to a question concerning the availability of medical records:

Regarding the medical records, I can give only information regarding Somaliland where I live and not the whole [of] Somalia. In Somaliland depending on the institutions and hospitals, some of them keep medical records while others have no system of record keeping. Dr Mahdi Multispecialty Hospital has electronic medical records and we keep medical records of all patients. (Managing Director 18 Jan. 2022)

The same source also indicated the following regarding the requirements and procedures to obtain medical records and the types of records issued:

Medical records are issued [at] the request of the patient or by another institution through the authorization of the patient and it could be a medical certificate stating the health of that person, a medical report used as a referral to another hospital, a death certificate and any other health-related issues asked by the client. (Managing Director 18 Jan. 2022)

In response to a question regarding whether an interested party can obtain medical records from abroad, the same source stated the following:

Yes, it is possible [on] the condition that the patient authorizes [this]; we sometimes fill out forms for Canadian citizens when renewing passports or the birth of a child and we get calls from the Canadian embassy in Nairobi to confirm [that] what we have signed is correct and [that] we know the person or the child. (Managing Director 18 Jan. 2022)

In contrast, the same source indicated that "most people never request medical records or death or birth certificates because they do not need them" (Managing Director 18 Jan. 2022).

The Managing Director also stated that they are not "aware of any forged medical records" for their institution but noted that they "cannot talk on behalf of other institutions" (Managing Director 18 Jan. 2022).

2.2 Education Records

The lawyers indicated that "education records, including diploma and certificates, can be obtained directly from the secondary school or university the individual attended" (Lawyers 14 Jan. 2022).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Director of the Examination and Certificates Office at the Formal Private Education Network in Somalia (FPENS) indicated that "most of the educational records in Somalia are available in all Somali academic institutions" (FPENS 16 Jan. 2022). The same source also noted that "teachers, students, examinations and certifications records are available" (FPENS 16 Jan. 2022). In response to a question about whether people can request and obtain education records from outside Somalia, the same source stated the following:

Yes, if a Diaspora person is a graduate from one of our schools, and [their] educational records are with us, [they] can come to get their certificates. But, [in the case of] any other person from abroad who happens to seek certificates illegally, we do not issue them. However, anyone from abroad ... can look for educational information from our institutions provided that [they] seek legal permission from our directorate office. (FPENS 16 Jan. 2022)

For further information on requirements and procedures to obtain certificates from FPENS, including a sample of a secondary school certificate, see Response to Information Request SOM200888 of January 2022.

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Chief Registrar of Mogadishu University stated that the institution "provides educational academic records" which are issued to their students who have graduated (Chief Registrar 22 Jan. 2022). The same source indicated that the types of documents they issue are a "diploma degree, master[s] degree and partial transcript and full transcript" (Chief Registrar 22 Jan. 2022). Sample copies of an "old" diploma, an "updated" diploma and a transcript, which were provided by the Chief Registrar, are attached to this Response (Attachments 1, 2 and 3). The Chief Registrar also indicated that the procedure for a former student to obtain records is to complete the clearance form that consists of the following:

1. financial clearance, to check [their] balance;
2. departmental clearance to check [their] marks, and finally;
3. the student must enroll at the alumni club of the university graduates and receive the ID of the alumni. (Chief Registrar 22 Jan. 2022)

Sample copies of clearance forms, provided by the Chief Registrar, sent respectively to the Research Directorate in January 2022 and in February 2017, are attached to this Response (Attachments 4 and 5).

The Chief Registrar indicated that the educational and academic records issued by Mogadishu University contain the following markers of authenticity:

- Logo of the university, dry stamp and sticker for dry stamp.
- Signatures and stamps of our chief registrar, dean of the faculty, vice president for academic affairs and the university president.
- Unique and special document format, frame and text style. (Chief Registrar 22 Jan. 2022)

In response to a question about whether former students of Mogadishu University can request and obtain education records from outside Somalia, the same source stated that "students out of the country have a right to request their academic documents including diploma degrees, transcripts and others by sending authorization letters to the admission and enrolment office, explaining the reason" (Chief Registrar 22 Jan. 2022).

The Chief Registrar of Mogadishu University also indicated that they have seen "a lot of falsification documents," and stated the following in this regard:

Fake records are common in our country, and we [see] false documentation (fake diploma degrees and fake transcripts) [every day]. Generally we use two ways of verification; email request verification and online verification portal. Any direction receives an application with a document from Mogadishu University addressed to our official email, then we verify its authenticity and send it back to them. (Chief Registrar 22 Jan. 2022)

2.3 Employment Records

Information on the availability of employment records was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The lawyers explained that "[e]mployment records, including position, compensation, and duration of employment can be requested, [but] are difficult to obtain" (Lawyers 14 Jan. 2022). According to the ReDSS, "[a]ccess to documentation differs in host and IDP communities, and IDPs have been repeatedly singled out as being disadvantaged by their lack of documentation in accessing work and basic services" (ReDSS [2019], 28).

3. Availability and Effectiveness of the Postal Service

Information on the availability and effectiveness of national and international postal services in Somalia was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3.1 National Postal Services

According to the SDC Executive Director, "[t]here is no postal service in Somalia" (Executive Director 13 Jan. 2022). The SCCSE President stated that "[t]he postal service has also collapsed with the fall of the government in 1991. The Federal government of Somalia has not revived since then" (President 13 Jan. 2022). The lawyers also indicated that "[i]n Somalia, a local postal service is not available. There is only DHL [an international shipping company (DHL n.d.)] services for international delivery" (Lawyers 14 Jan. 2022).

3.2 International Postal and Courier Service Providers

The website of the United States Postal Service (USPS) indicates, regarding country conditions for mailing to Somalia, that "[a]ll mail services are suspended" (US n.d.b). The SDC Executive Director stated that the postal service does not exist in Somalia, and based on their knowledge, "only DHL" is functioning there (Executive Director 13 Jan. 2022). According to the SCCSE President, "[c]arriers are available but they are very expensive. There is no house address in Somalia, so people have to come to carriers' offices to pick their items up" (President 13 Jan. 2022). The lawyers noted that "DHL services function effectively at an international level" (Lawyers 14 Jan. 2022).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] *Kafala* (sponsorship) is a system used by Gulf countries which "ties migrant workers' residency permits to 'sponsoring' employers" and obliges domestic workers to obtain "the consent of the employer if they want to change jobs, and those who leave before the end of their contracts can be imprisoned, fined, or deported" (HRW 11 June 2016).

[2] The Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS) is comprised of the following 14 NGOs: Action contre la faim (ACF), ACTED, CARE International, Concern Worldwide, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), INTERSOS, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Mercy Corps, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Oxfam, the Refugee Consortium of Kenya (RCK), Save the Children, and World Vision (ReDSS n.d.).

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Chief Registrar, Mogadishu University. 22 January 2022. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

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President, Somali Canadian Cultural Society of Edmonton (SCCSE). 13 January 2022. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS). [2019]. [Solutions Analysis Update 2019: Case Study on Lessons Learnt and Practices to Support \(Re\)Integration Programming – Modadishu, Baidoa and Kismayo](#). [Accessed 12 Jan. 2022]

[Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat \(ReDSS\). N.d. "Background."](#) [Accessed 14 Jan. 2022]

[Somali Development Center \(SDC\). N.d. "Who We Are."](#) [Accessed 14 Jan. 2022]

United States (US). N.d.a. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs. ["Somalia Reciprocity Schedule."](#) [Accessed 6 Jan. 2022]

United States (US). N.d.b. United States Postal Service (USPS). ["Country Conditions for Mailing – Somalia"](#). [Accessed 6 Jan. 2022]

World Bank, et al. 2016. Tariq Malik, et al. [Toward a Somali Identification System: ID4D Diagnostic](#). [Accessed 10 Jan. 2022]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Abubashir Hospital; Al Medina Specialty Hospital; Amoud University; Benadir University; DHL Express – Mogadishu; East Africa University; Eelo University; Federation of Somali Trade Unions; Gollis University; Haldoor Multispecialty & Teaching Hospital; Hargeisa International Hospital; Indian Ocean University; Jamhuriya University of Science and Technology; Jazeera Specialist Hospital; Jazeera University; Jobkey University; Kaah Community Hospital; Kalkaal Hospital; Kismayo University; Mogadishu City Hospital; Nugaal University; Plasma University; professor at a Somali university specializing in health policies in Somali; Puntland State University; Salaam University; Shaafi International Hospital; SIMAD University; Somali Canadian and Rural Development Organization; Somali Canadian Association of Etobicoke; Somali Canadian Society of Calgary; Somali National University; Somali Public Trade Union; Somali Sudanese Specialized Hospital; Somalia – Embassy of the Federal Republic of Somalia at Washington, DC, Ministry of Communication and Technology, Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs; University of Hargeisa; University of Somalia; University of Southern Somalia; Yardimeli Specialist Hospital; Zamzam University of Science and Technology.

Internet sites, including: Abubashir Hospital; Al Medina Specialty Hospital; Amnesty International; Amoud University; Asylum Research Centre Foundation; Australia – Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Austrian Red Cross – Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation; BBC; Benadir University; East Africa University; Eelo University; Factiva; Federation of Somali Trade Unions; France – Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides; Freedom House; Gollis University; Haldoor Multispecialty & Teaching Hospital; Hargeisa International Hospital; Harvard University – International Human Rights Clinic; Hiiran Online; Indian Ocean University; Jamhuriya University of Science and Technology; Jazeera Specialist Hospital; Jazeera University; Jobkey University; Jowhar; Kaah Community Hospital; Kalkaal Hospital; Kismayo University; Mareeg Media; Mogadishu City Hospital; Mogadishu University; Norway – Landinfo; Norwegian Refugee Council; Nugaal University; Plasma University; Puntland Post; Somali Canadian and Rural Development Organization; Somali Canadian Association of Etobicoke; Somali Canadian Cultural Society of Edmonton; Somali Canadian Society of Calgary; Somali Development Center; Somalia – Embassy of the Federal Republic of Somalia in Ottawa, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Somalia in Washington, DC, Ministry of Communication and Technology, Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs; Somaliland Sun; UK – Home Office; UN – Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Refworld, UN Human Settlements Programme, UNHCR, UN Assistance Mission in Somalia; University of Hargeisa; University of Somalia; University of Southern Somalia; Yardimeli Hospital; Zamzam University of Science and Technology.

Attachments

1. Mogadishu University. N.d. Admission and Enrollment Office. Copy of an "old" diploma. Sent to the Research Directorate by the Chief Registrar of Mogadishu University, 22 January 2022. Translated by the Translation Bureau, Public Services and Procurement Canada.

2. Mogadishu University. N.d. Admission and Enrollment Office. Copy of an "updated" diploma. Sent to the Research Directorate by the Chief Registrar of Mogadishu University, 22 January 2022. Translated by the Translation Bureau, Public Services and Procurement Canada.
3. Mogadishu University. N.d. Admission and Enrollment Office. Copy of a transcript. Sent to the Research Directorate by the Chief Registrar of Mogadishu University, 22 January 2022. Translated by the Translation Bureau, Public Services and Procurement Canada.
4. Mogadishu University. N.d. Admission and Enrollment Office. Copy of clearance form. Sent to the Research Directorate by the Chief Registrar of Mogadishu University, 22 January 2022. Translated by the Translation Bureau, Public Services and Procurement Canada.
5. Mogadishu University. N.d. Admission and Enrollment Office. Copy of clearance form. Sent to the Research Directorate by the Chief Registrar of Mogadishu University, 26 February 2017.

ecoi.net summary:

Query response on Somalia:
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